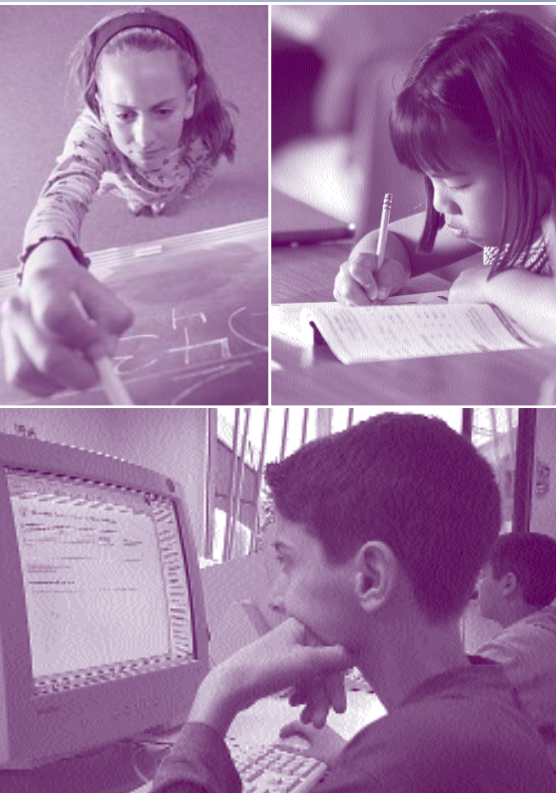


# State Representative **Scott Pelath**



## *Session Report*



- ☒ The New State Budget
- ☒ Protection of Riverboat Revenue
- ☒ Daylight-Saving Time
- ☒ Inspector General Bill

# INDIANA'S NEW BUDGET



## School Funding Cuts and Increased Property Taxes

I believe the newly-passed state budget is wrong for schools and property taxes in LaPorte County. I opposed the two-year plan, which passed the Indiana House of Representatives by a narrow margin.

Let there be no mistake or misunderstanding: this budget is a body blow to thousands of school kids in LaPorte County. For anyone who cares about our public schools, it is simply indefensible.

More than 140 school corporations across Indiana receive cuts, with Michigan City Area Schools (MCAS) among the hardest hit. The budget slashes state support for MCAS by \$2.4 million over the next two fiscal years. Even if the corporation raises every school property tax allowable, resources will be cut by more than \$1 million.

LaPorte Community School Corporation fares better but still faces insufficient funding. The corporation is allowed a negligible overall increase of less than one

percent but only by forcing increases in school property taxes by 4.2 percent in the first year and another 6.1 percent the second year.

I believe the hidden trick in this budget is the massive

**"It is  
apparent to  
me that  
schools are  
not a priority  
for some of  
our state's  
leaders."**

tax shift to property owners. As feared, the budget strictly limits state dollars used to hold down property taxes. In 2002, the state sales tax increased by 1 percent, and the revenue generated by that increase was promised to property taxpayers to lessen the pain of reassessment.

The bill controls state spending by forcing schools and local government to raise \$847.1 million in property taxes statewide. Experts estimate that \$5.4 million of these increases may be pushed on LaPorte County.

## Protecting Riverboat Revenue

I am pleased that a coalition of legislators was able to derail an effort to strip counties like LaPorte of riverboat revenues. However, some legislators continue to support the idea, and we will need to monitor the situation carefully during the next session.



**Rep. Pelath reviews  
legislation at his desk.**

The House Ways and Means Committee passed language during this year's session that would have grabbed over \$12 million in wagering tax revenue from LaPorte County. It was a brazen attempt to steal riverboat

revenue from gaming communities along both the Ohio River and Lake Michigan.

Under the plan, riverboat areas would have lost all wagering tax distributions and a supplemental distribution used to bolster admissions tax revenue. In that scenario, Michigan City would have lost \$10.8 million, LaPorte County \$1.2 million and the area Convention and Visitors Bureau \$124,000. This was an action that would have had dire consequences for our area.

Due to the bipartisan opposition of a majority of House members, we were able to stop this proposal dead in its tracks. Rest assured that I will continue to oppose any efforts that will remove our riverboat revenues from our communities.



# Time bill, Colts scheme don't help LaPorte County

**T**wo initiatives—Daylight-Saving Time and the funding of a new stadium for the Indianapolis Colts—received much of the media coverage during this year's session. I opposed the final versions of both bills because they were unfair to LaPorte County.

These pieces of legislation were pushed by folks who believe the world ends about 30 miles north of Indianapolis. The result only serves to isolate Northwest Indiana from the rest of the state.



The legislature decided that most of Indiana will observe Eastern Daylight-Saving Time beginning next April after several votes, many delays and muscle from Governor Mitch Daniels. The end result for LaPorte County? We will continue to observe our current time schedule but will now be an hour behind most of Indiana, including South Bend and Indianapolis, all year long. I believe all of Indiana should observe *Central* Daylight-Saving Time—the same as we do.

If the goal of this legislation was a show of political force from the governor, then it was a success. If the goal was to develop a uniform time standard for our state, it was a failure.

One provision of the legislation requires the governor to petition the United States Department of Transportation to hold hearings to determine the time zone in which Indiana should be located. Even though the governor expressed a clear desire last fall that he preferred the central time zone, he has now reversed course and asked for hearings without stating a preference. I believe this scenario will not lead to an optimal outcome for LaPorte County.

Throughout the past session, I opposed several plans to fund a new Colts stadium. We devoted numerous session days and committee meetings to finding a way to keep the Colts in Indianapolis, but yet we found no way to keep Michigan City Schools from losing millions in funding.

The ambition of some has gotten in the way of basic priorities. It is a shame we can build new, gleaming stadiums for millionaires but cannot provide the funds for our local children to earn a decent education.

I remain confident we will survive in LaPorte County through the efforts of our educators, parents and community leaders. I am deeply disappointed, however, that the legislature has let them down.

## Tracking Sex Offenders

**A** person convicted of possessing child pornography who has a prior conviction for that offense will be required to register as a sex offender. The state will be allowed to seek life in prison without parole for a person who has multiple felony offenses involving sex crimes against a child.



**Rep. Pelath studies legislation on the House floor with Rep. Dennie Oxley.**

## Protecting Victims

**V**ictims will be automatically notified when offenders are released from prison or have their status changed. Offenders on home detention will be ordered to wear monitoring devices that constantly track their location.

## Protecting Firefighters

**V**olunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians will not be penalized by their employers for being absent when they are responding to emergency calls.

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## Pelath helps forge compromise on Inspector General Bill

I thought the Governor was right when he said he wanted to fight government corruption. But when he wanted to usurp our local, elected prosecutors, he went too far.

After accepting a series of amendments originally advocated by House Democrats, legislators created the post of Inspector General to investigate government corruption. I was pleased to see a renewed willingness to compromise on both sides of the aisle, and the result was a measure that strengthens public trust in government without an unnecessary expansion of executive power.

The Inspector General will be focused on what needs to be done: respond to public concerns that state officials are engaged in corruption. Once the Inspector General investigates a complaint and determines that a crime may have been committed, it will be elected judges and prosecutors making key decisions about whether to file charges.

I met with Governor Daniels to express my concerns that the original language of the bill placed too much power in one person. The meeting helped forge a middle ground and provided the support needed to pass the legislation.

Under the revised bill, local county prosecutors will be given the Inspector General's materials on a complaint, then determine whether to proceed with charges. The law also ensures that judges over such cases are randomly selected—it cannot just be the one a governor likes best. In earlier versions of a bill, the matter of prosecution was left to the Inspector General, which meant the fate of a potential criminal case could be decided by an appointed official rather than an elected county prosecutor.

House Democrats also succeeded in amending the legislation further to ensure that the Inspector General's records are open to public inspection and that the office is subject to the state's Open Door Law. In the end, it was a bill that everyone could live with and passed by a unanimous vote of 96-0.



**Rep. Pelath reviews House floor motions with Rep. Matt Whetstone (R-Brownsburg).**

## Representative Scott Pelath

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